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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly reviews how New York City has developed its bureaucratic school structures, the pathologies that have developed within them, and some remedies that can help to change them into structures that will improve city schools. Some historians claimed that reformers purposely created bureaucratic school systems to provide a docile pool of trained manpower for the growing industrial machine. Others attributed it to the pressure of numbers. Regardless of the reason for the development of educational bureaucracies they do have severe disadvantages. They are inefficient, they are educationally ineffective, and they are likely to violate basic democratic values such as individualism, fairness, political accountability, and respect for pluralistic values. Although existing practices are resistant to change, some of the areas in which change should be initiated are: budget reform, school level management, and decentralization of very large systems. It is suggested that the ills of the bureaucratic structure can be diminished under a city education commissioner only if certain minimum requirements are set up to prevent him from merely taking over and being captured by the present school bureaucracy. (Author/AM)

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SPECIAL REPORT

BUREAUCRACY AND THE SCHOOLS

by

David Seeley

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June 1977

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Introduction

New York City is once again in the throes of a discussion about the governance of its public schools. The Mayor's proposal to abolish the lay board of education and substitute a mayoral commissioner is but the latest indication of dissatisfaction with the present system. While some are strongly for or against the Mayor's proposal, many more wonder what difference it would make. So many changes have been tried and have failed that the question of governance has become a tiresome subject. Even State Education Commissioner Nyquist, who says he favors the Mayor's proposal, calls it "a bad idea whose time has come." His reasoning: five changes have been made in the top governing structure of the city schools since 1962--all to no avail; we therefore might as well try this new idea.[1]

This paper will suggest that the reason why previous changes in the Board of Education have accomplished so little is that none of them dealt with the basic problem, which is not the structure at the top, but the entrenched bureaucracy underneath it. It is very clear both to those who have had to deal with large city school systems, and to those who have studied them, that "control of education has passed out of the hands of lay boards and into the hands of bureaucracies," and that the large school bureaucracies themselves have become increasingly inefficient, ineffective, and resistant to change.[2]

While there has been much rhetoric about change, there has been little actual change in the schools or classrooms themselves.[3] It is time to recognize that the bureaucratic structure of our large city school systems is a major reason why this is so.[4]

This paper will review briefly how we developed our bureaucratic school structures, the pathologies that have developed within them, and some remedies that can help us change and transform them into structures that will enable us to rebuild urban education to meet the needs of city children in the coming decades.

Historical Perspective

When the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers. Are today's mindless school bureaucracies the "answered prayers" of America's educational reformers?

Horace Mann's biographer, Jonathan Messerli, claims that "Mann and his countless coworkers could not conceive of the possibility that those who would follow in their footsteps might actually build a suffocating and sometimes mindnumbing establishmentarian bureaucracy. Nor could they envision that in the hands of lesser individuals their cherished institution, instead of functioning as a fundamental part of the social solution they sought, could become an integral part of the problem."[5]

Diane Ravitch writes that in New York City the great school leaders at the turn of the century quite consciously built an administrative structure that was "highly centralized, highly professionalized, and highly bureaucratized...[with] minimal provision for public involvement in school policy."[6] New York was typical of developments in school administration throughout the country.

Some historians claim that these "reformers" purposely created bureaucratic school systems to provide a docile pool of trained manpower for our growing industrial machine.[7] Others produce evidence of the intentions of the white Protestant American middle classes to impose their cultural values on the lower classes and the new immigrants as a major reason for shifting control of public education to a professional bureaucracy, immune from the politics of poor neighborhoods and polyglot "newcomers," but under the continuing influence of the dominant groups.[8]

Others find simpler explanations for the development of bureaucratic school systems: between 1820 and 1860 urbanization created "the pressure of numbers [which] was a main reason for the bureaucratization that gradually replaced the older decentralized village pattern of schooling."[9] Between 1880 and 1920 the corporate bureaucracy, with a single chief executive, an orderly chain of command, role differentiation, and uniform policies, gained increasing influence as an appropriate model for the educational "progressive experts" and to the "business and professional men" who spearheaded the centralization movement and later sat on the small lay boards of education.[10] Furthermore, once bureaucracy was established, much of the pathology we see today can be explained through the natural tendency of job holders to seek greater power and security. The demands for professionalization provided an excellent reason to enlarge supervisory and administrative staffs to their present awesome size.[11]

Whatever the explanations of <u>why</u> we built our great city school systems on the model of corporate bureaucracies, history confronts us with the <u>fact</u> that this is what we did. Until we understand

the nature of these bureaucracies and how they stand as obstacles to educational effectiveness in our city schools, there will be little chance of improving the governance of urban education.

The Pathologies of Large School Bureaucracies

While bureaucratic organization has advantages for certain kinds of functions, it has severe disadvantages when applied to a function like education, in a large city, and in a society that purports to be democratic. The more we study how large educational bureaucracies work, the easier it is to see why they are so inefficient, so educationally ineffective, and so likely to violate basic democratic values such as individualism, fairness, political accountability, and respect for pluralistic values.

Inefficiency

It is ironic that what was supposed to be one of the more obvious advantages of bureaucratic organization for large city school systems--namely simple efficiency or "more bang for the buck"--has become in practice one of its more obvious disadvantages.

The public is likely to hear only about the sensational examples of inefficiency, such as purchasing school supplies at 30% above their price in the local supermarket or stationery store, or spending millions of dollars extra for tests from a publisher who has given the head of the school system's research department over $400,000 in "royalties" and fees.[12]

But these examples are just the tip of the iceberg. As we look deeper into the operations of the large school bureaucracies we find that whole subsystems, such as custodial and lunch services, or building maintenance, are grossly inefficient. When we look deeper still, we find that the basic processes of budgeting and spending money are not even based on principles of efficiency. Money is added to the budget or cut from the budget, as the case may be, not on the basis of what will add the most to or detract the least from the educational mission of the system, but on principles that have more to do with the interests of the bureaucracy than the interests of those whom it is intended to serve.

These characteristics of bureaucratic school systems are not limited to New York City or any given period of time. We must begin to see that they are quite natural tendencies of this type of organization. For in a public bureaucracy there are no "mechanisms available to harness...self-seeking to the public interest." As a consequence, Jacob Michaelsen argues, "Each bureaucrat, then, will seek in good faith to maximize the activities over which he has control. In a word, budgets rather than profits are maximized. Larger budgets will also help the bureaucrat to survive, to increase his prestige, to buy out of conflict, and generally to gain control over his environment. Thus, self-seeking behavior can easily be masked in a bureaucratic setting."[13]

The result of these natural incentives in a large school system is an educational process that has come to cost more and more and deliver less and less education per dollar spent.[14] The budget of the New York City school system increased from under $300 million in the early 1950's to almost $3 billion in the early 1970's, and few would argue that the public has received commensurate benefit from this huge increase. There is every prospect that if we maintain our present type of organizational system we will continue to increase costs without regard to benefits--or if the money turns out to be more limited, and it appears that it will--we will increasingly cut back on services to pay for ever-increasing costs.

What must be realized is that the inefficiency of the system is not limited to such areas as purchases and building maintenance, but that it even more seriously affects the educational process itself. There is nothing more "inefficient" than a classroom in which learning is not taking place, or a school where children are learning defeat and alienation. As we shall see, the bureaucratic model of organization in large city school systems militates against good educational results, and this is the greatest inefficiency of all.

Educationally ineffective

The more we see our large school bureaucracies in operation, the more we see why they are so educationally ineffective: they denigrate the two key people in the educational process--the teacher and the learner.

Bureaucracy and professionalism are like oil and water--they don't mix.[15] One is based on hierarchical authority, the other on the authority of expertise. One emphasizes the ability of the supervisor to control the behavior of the subordinate official; the other emphasizes the individual responsibility of the professional to carry out a professional mission. In our educational bureaucracies the teacher is at the "bottom" of the system whereas, educationally, the teacher should be the heart of the whole process.[16]

By the nature of a bureaucracy, the main method of control from above is through policies and rules, and for practical reasons these have to be the more easily enforceable rules.[17] A teacher can teach best, however, not by following rules but by interacting intelligently and creatively with a group of students. The result of bureaucracy at its silliest is the system which cares more whether teachers have their shades drawn to the prescribed level than whether children are learning. And the same forces that produce such ludicrous examples operate pervasively to deaden the ability of teachers to teach.

It is not that bureaucracies cannot use professional workers effectively under certain circumstances. General Motors can hire engineers and lawyers and put them to work productively in the business of making money. When the goals are clear and accountability

strong, professional skills can often be combined with a bureaucratic organization to good effect. But in our large school bureaucracies we seem to have the worst of both worlds. Teachers and principals can proclaim their professionalism to avoid accountability from above, but then act as "employees" who need do only what they are told--which is often confused, and sometimes nothing at all.[18]

The worst aspects of professional guild instincts tend to be reinforced. A slavish adherence to seniority, for instance, satisfies the protectionist instinct of a professional group as well as fitting in comfortably with the desire of the bureaucracy to operate by simple, easily enforceable rules. The result, however, militates against the profession's commitment to its mission, and against the bureaucracy's interest in merit.[19] Likewise reward for merit, either in terms of pay or promotion, which is quite normal in an organization disciplined by the profit motive, is hardly ever found in bureaucratic school systems, where "professionalism" is defined to preclude competition, and where the bureaucracy is comfortable with "interchangeable parts" which fit into the organization chart in an orderly, rational way.[20]

The downgrading of the teacher in the bureaucratic hierarchy is bad enough. The student is in even worse shape: he is not seen as part of the educational system at all. Instead, the student is the "client" of the system--the person "served" by the system--or perhaps the "target" of the system.[21]

This may seem rational enough, if the system is a hierarchically organized group of employees, each with a specific job to do, each trained and supervised to do that job, and controlled by a set of rules and policies that are a condition of employment. The student, his family and community are quite naturally seen as "outside" such a system. Students are, after all, unpredictable and varied and not subject to the disciplines of employment, and their families and communities are even further outside the "span of control" of the bureaucratic order.

The only trouble is that such concepts work against the fundamental spirit of the educational process. Students are the most important "producers" in education; they have to do most of the work in producing learning.[22] They must be perceived as an integral <u>part</u> of the process, not as the <u>targets</u> of the process. Everyone else in the educational system--<u>teachers</u>, principals, counselors, librarians, etc.--are best thought of as <u>facilitators</u> of student learning, not as the prime <u>producers</u> of learning. Children are not like raw material that needs processing, that can be stacked and sorted and efficiently dealt with by a mechanical bureaucracy.[23] Education is a matter of growth and development of complex individuals, who not only vary from one to another but from one minute to the next.

Albert Hirschman pointed out that organizations often fail to make sufficient use of "resources and abilities that are hidden, scattered, or badly utilized."[24] The greatest unused "resource" is students themselves, who, while they are seen as outside the system--even a well intentioned system--are less likely to be engaged in helping to produce their own learning. Frank Reissman urged that we shift from a compensatory model to a "strength" model in urban education.[25] But the bureaucratic organizational conception is not comfortable dealing with the "strength" of those it is "serving," since this strength is outside its control mechanisms. It is more comfortable conceiving of students as passive and inert, available for its ministrations.[26]

Not only do bureaucratic educational systems tend to underutilize or misuse teaching and learning resources, but their natural reactions to ineffective education often make matters worse. When parents complain of poor education and demand "accountability" from the system, there is a tendency to increase bureaucratic control from the top, which may well cause further misuse and abuse of teachers and learners and thus produce even worse educational results.[27] There is a tendency to add more administrators, supervisors and central office staff, which not only diverts available resources from the classroom, but may increase interference with the teaching-learning process. One study, for instance, shows that the higher the proportion of administrators to teachers, the lower the academic achievement.[28]

All in all, the bureaucratic system of organization is a monstrosity from an educational point of view. It oppresses teachers and administrators as well as students. As one scholar put it, there is something inherent in the nature and ethos of bureaucratic organizations as they have evolved in America that causes them to "'sanitize' and thereby impoverish the lives of people they touch."[29] No wonder that Walter Mondale could conclude that "We are mutilating the spirits of millions of American children every day and it surely is a sin."[30]

Undemocratic

Even if our educational bureaucracies were efficient and effective--and as we have seen they are neither--they would still present us with serious problems because their natural methods of operating violate some of the most fundamental values of our type of society: individualism, pluralism, political accountability and fairness.[31]

One of the main virtues of the bureaucratic organization is that it can deal with masses of people and things on an organized basis. But to do so it must be able to categorize and manipulate these elements on a rational basis. It is this which leads to the charge that bureaucracies "dehumanize" people.[32] Society may decide to pay the price of this dehumanization for certain types of enterprise, such as the army, where the need for rule-following behavior is strong

and the sacrifice of individualism is voluntary or temporary. We have seen how, for education, such an approach interferes with the learning process. But in addition to its ineffectiveness, it is also fundamentally repugnant to our values. We want an educational system that will enhance individual responsibility rather than create docile, dependent personalities. The growing objections to "labeling" handicapped children and the new federal requirements for developing an "Individualized Education Plan" for each student represent a revolt against the normal behavior of our educational bureaucracies. These challenges are likely to spread beyond the field of special education.[33]

Closely related to their violation of individualism is the way in which bureaucratic systems tend to deny family and diverse cultural values. The "upward" direction of bureaucracies looks away from the family level, and the diversity of values represented in a pluralistic society is an annoyance to a system which is established on the basis of uniform rules and policies. Indeed it is one of the supposed "virtues" of the system that it treats everyone the same.[34] Historically, as we have seen, one of the purposes of an isolated professional bureaucracy was to facilitate the assimilation of people from various cultural backgrounds into a single American culture, and the structure of the system is admirably suited to this purpose. It has great difficulty, for instance, adjusting to pluralistic values which might interfere with free transfer of staff within the system based on an "interchangeable parts" conception.

Beyond individuals and families, one could say that our bureaucratic school systems deny the rights and interests of entire communities, in that they have become increasingly remote from responsible political accountability. Harmon Zeigler, one of our foremost students of school governance, and his associates have pointed out that our present arrangement "violates a fundamental principle of democratic institutions," in that boards of education have little real control and are very imperfectly accountable to the public.[35] And Jacob Michaelsen wrote, "Full tax support and compulsion firmly established the power of common school administrators and, in a different way, teachers over parents and children. Indeed they created the essential conditions for insulating school management from citizens generally, namely "the assurance of a budget independent of satisfied customers."[36] Michaelsen also noted that those within the bureaucracy have much greater opportunity to organize politically to maintain their position, unlike the client community which is usually unorganized and without the necessary resources for effective political representation.

One of the ironies of the situation, which clearly reveals the basic structural inappropriateness of the bureaucratic organization, is that the more "responsive" a board of education is, the less "efficient" the system will be in terms of its own organizational principles. A board of education which is highly responsive to the clients of the system will constantly be interfering with school

administration, and with the professional roles of those within it. This is one of the reasons, as was pointed out in our brief historical review, that the original idea was to "remove the school system from politics."[37] We lose either way with this kind of system: bureaucratic efficiency means weak accountability to communities served, and accountability means reduced efficiency.

Lastly, and most ironically, we find that our bureaucratic school systems are unfair and inequitable, the one thing we could have hoped to avoid in an "objective," "rational," and "depersonalized" bureaucracy.[38] Both the Hobson case in Washington, D.C. and the federal Office of Civil Rights report on New York City indicate that resources tend to be allocated very unfairly, to the disadvantage of the system's most disadvantaged clients.[39] Despite its supposed impartiality, we find that the large city bureaucracy still responds to those with power, both inside and outside the system. However, the impartial face presented by the bureaucracy to the public tends to mask its inequities, and therefore obstructs their correction.

The very thought patterns of the bureaucracy tend to preserve its inequities. Two schools can be considered "equal" in the bureaucratic mind so long as they have the same number of teachers per pupil and the same amount of resources, even though one may be a highly productive learning environment while the other may be systematically destroying the educational potential of its students. As educational sociologist Dan Lortie stated, the "conception of equality as sameness pervades organizational life."[40] This often results in the same, and therefore "equal," methods and measurable resources being applied to highly varied situations, sometimes with disastrous results for those so "served."[41]

Resistance to change

If our bureaucratic school systems are inefficient, ineffective, and undemocratic, why aren't they changed to correct these evident evils? A bureaucratic organization, with clear command from the top and ability to hire specialized staff for research and planning might theoretically be expected to be highly adaptive to changing circumstances. The actual behavior of our large city school systems is notoriously the opposite. They have ground down and worn out virtually all efforts for reform both from within and from without. "Educators in big cities remain insulated from the massive social changes of the past twenty years and have become protectionist in the face of new demands by citizen groups."[42]

The reasons for this resistance to change are not hard to find once we combine the theoretical model of how a bureaucracy is intended to work with the realities of human behavior in the kind of systems we have established. A large bureaucracy must be governed by rules, policies, and careful job descriptions through which the work of thousands of people can be organized into a supposedly coordinated enterprise. Once people are trained to perform their respective

roles, however, they develop a vested interest in preserving them. People do not like to change their habits or their working patterns. Even more important is that established bureaucracies develop informal power relationships and interests which are even less amenable to change because they are not part of the official rules and regulations which can be amended.[43]

The "top down" nature of the bureaucratic model is particularly maladaptive to the kinds of changes called for in school systems. While a superintendent or board of education may well see that educational results are not what they ought to be and that changes are needed, it is classroom teachers and principals who are most likely to be able to develop the changes needed to get better results. But, as we pointed out, these people are at the "bottom" of the system, with little authority for initiating change. Furthermore, the top officials, operating in a political context, are likely to have much of their time and attention taken up with "putting out fires" and dealing with issues on the basis of their political urgency rather than their importance to the mission of the system.

The result is that, since real change is very difficult, the top management will respond to demands for change either by defending the bureaucracy or by superficial, faddish changes--visible new programs which can be added to existing practices and reported to the public to give the impression of innovation. Meanwhile the existing practices continue unchanged, and even the innovations, if they become too threatening to bureaucratic interests, can be co-opted into the system or squeezed out of existence once they lose public attention.[44] As long as the mandates from above are sufficiently unclear or inconsistant, which they usually are in a large, pluralistic city school system, the bureaucracy can usually wait out changes initiated from time to time.

Remedies

One might think that with such evident flaws we would by now have found alternatives to the bureaucratic system for education. But as Max Weber wrote in his classic study of bureaucracy, "Once it is fully established, bureaucracy is among those social institutions which is hardest to destroy."[45] Indeed, there seems to be some indication that bureaucracies become increasingly entrenched with age, even as they become less productive. Diane Ravitch noted that in the "first flush" of intensive bureaucratization in New York City at the turn of the century, schools enjoyed considerable innovation and increased efficiency.[46] But, in a process which Weber refers to as the "routinization of charisma," the great minds and spirits which establish such systems tend to be replaced in time with people who, as Michaelsen says "seek instead to survive, to enlarge the scope of their activities, to gain prestige, to avoid conflict, to control the organization and content of their daily round as much as possible."[47]

In his study of the bureaucracy at 110 Livingston Street, David Rogers noted that:

> "The institution has organizational defenses that allow it to function in inefficient, unprofessional, undemocratic, and politically costly ways without evoking more of a revolution or push for radical change than has yet emerged. It has an almost unlimited capacity for absorbing protest and externalizing the blame, for confusing and dividing the opposition, "seeming" to appear responsive to legitimate protest by issuing sophisticated and progressive policy statements that are poorly implemented, if at all, and then pointing to all its paper "accomplishments" over the years as evidence both of good faith and effective performance."[48]

Nevertheless, the fact that the bureaucratic system is becoming so obviously dysfunctional may give us hope that changes can be made. After all, it is only in recent years that the structure of the system itself has begun to be seen as a major source of the problem.[49] Indeed, one of our major students of management proclaims that important changes are already underway, with a shift from the bureaucratic model to a more "organic-adaptive structure," in which people are "differentiated not vertically, according to rank and role, but flexibly and functionally according to skill and professional training."[50]

As Shields stated, "institutions are man-made and can be changed; new agendas can be introduced."[51] What are some of the "new agendas" that should be considered?

1. Budget reform The bureaucracy's control over money is a major way in which it retains its power. As we have seen, that control is not directed toward maximum efficiency or maximum learning, but toward maximum budgets and maximum stability.[52] As Charles Lindblom and Aaron Wildavsky, noted students of bureaucracy pointed out, under a bureaucratic system "incremental" budgeting is normal and serves functional purposes for the bureaucracy.[53] The yearly "add on" of funds to cover increased costs of old programs without change, and the costs of a few new programs on top of the old ones, is the easiest way to maintain stability and the power relationships of the hierarchy.

Now that money is scarcer, the destructive aspects of incremental budgeting are becoming more evident as program cuts are made that are even more irrational than the "add ons" of more prosperous days.[54] Public pressure is mounting to insist that scarce resources be spent in accordance with the priorities of the schools' mission--the education of children--rather than the priorities of the bureaucracy.

Efforts such as those of the Educational Priorities Panel in New York City--a coalition of eighteen parent and civic groups--to press for a shift to this kind of priority budgeting is an effort to reduce

one of the most dangerous manifestations of educational bureaucracies. Unlike bureaucratic budget reforms, such as PPBS or zero-based budgeting, which some see as only more elaborate tools that enable the bureaucracy to further its own interests, the reforms advocated by the Educational Priorities Panel, as a coalition of outside groups, attempt to bring the client interest to bear on the budget decisions.[55] If appropriating authorities, such as legislatures, city councils and county commissions, can be pursuaded to pay more attention to client groups, rather than simply rubber stamping (or for that matter mindlessly rejecting) the budgets presented by school bureaucracies, some of the wastefulness of present school systems might be reduced, while at the same time school policy might be opened to greater public participation.

2. School level management A reform gaining increasing momentum is to shift decision-making authority as much as possible to the school level--a concept which has been given the unguinly label of "school site management." This was recommended by both the City Club of New York and the Public Education Association in the 1960's. PEA, for instance, recommended in 1969: "planning councils at each city high school, where representatives of the student body, staff and community can get the help of people from labor, business and the universities in building new programs that will work." It is now also a major recommendation of the Aspen Institute program on school reform, which is concluding three years of intensive study of the ills of, and cures for, public education in America in the coming decades.[56]

Some elements of this approach are now being tried in New York City under the auspices of the Economic Development Council and the Urban Coalition.[57] Thus far in a number of New York schools, the approach has started the various parties talking together and developing a mutual "self help" attitude, which is an important beginning step in one of the most highly bureaucratized systems in the country.[58] Elsewhere the approach, more fully advanced, shows signs of creating a school climate quite different from the traditional bureaucratic model. Ultimately, if enough responsibility is shifted to the school level, particularly in the areas of budget and personnel, school staff could begin to assume more responsibility for results, more pride in their work, and a closer relationship could grow among teachers, students, parents and community. In any large system there doubtless will result a mixture of policies--those made by the central authority and those made at the school level, but a school site management approach could greatly increase the empowerment of teachers, parents, and students alike, thereby reducing some of the worst evils of the bureaucratic structure.

3. Decentralization of very large systems While the individual school unit is undoubtedly the most effective unit for most school decision-making, some decisions and monitoring must occur at levels above the school. There is no agreement on the ideal size for such decision-making units, but it is clear that our largest cities are far beyond any manageable size. Even such visible and important

functions as choosing school principals are impossible to perform or monitor effectively in a system of over 900 schools, such as New York's. Hence the drive to decentralize. So called "administrative decentralization," achieved by voluntary delegation of authority to "area superintendents" and other intermediate echelons is not likely to have much effect on the basic bureaucratic structure, because political accountability will always require that too many decisions rise to the "top." But local jurisdictions with real authority to make decisions can change the structure of the bureaucracy by providing intermediate levels where "the buck stops," and therefore where client participation can be effective.

New York City's decentralization law of 1969 was a particularly botched-up affair which gave overlapping authority to both local and central units, leaving the previous bureaucratic structure intact. The newly created local jurisdictions could only struggle in frustration to carve out roles for themselves. Retention of central control over personnel and budget has particularly emasculated the local boards. The fact that the law also created an election system for the local boards which--because of the large number of candidates and lack of information about them--is almost impossible for the average citizen to comprehend, also has undermined the legitimacy of the local boards.

If properly carried out, however, with clearly defined functions and decision-making authority at the various levels of the system, decentralization can mitigate some of the worse excesses of a very large bureaucratic system.

4. "Truth in Bargaining" The corporate-style bureaucratic structure we chose for our school systems brought with it in due course corporate-style unions and labor relations. In the bureaucratic model, teachers, instead of being the central professional personnel in the system, are only cogs in a machine--the least significant employees in the hierarchy. Partly in reaction against this low status, teachers formed strong unions to challenge the power of the bureaucracy. Ironically, while teacher unions have succeeded in dramatically gaining power at the expense of the higher officials of the bureaucracy (principals, headquarters staff, board members), the result in some ways has been to make the system more bureaucratic than ever. Increasing numbers of crucial decisions are made at the "top," without reference to particular circumstances and relationships in individual schools, with little or no parent or public voice, often even in total secrecy.[59] Not only do parents feel increasingly alienated from the system, but even teachers have gained their group power at the expense of further loss of individual judgement and control over their work, which is at the heart of professional identity.[60] As the British educators who recently visited New York City schools pointed out, "The wooden-horse in the system is the teachers' contract."[61]

Collective bargaining is here to stay, but there has been increasing understanding in recent years that public sector bargaining is very

different from bargaining in private industry, and that adjustments must be made to reflect the fact that in the public sector it is basically a political rather than an economic process.[62] Public policy decisions are made at the bargaining table (and in related backroom political dealings) which determine how public money will be spent and how schools will be run. The decisions are made in secret, and by boards of education that are often politically accountable to the very unions with which they are bargaining.

A number of ideas have been proposed to open these decisions to greater public discussion and debate, such as more extensive review of contract demands, analysis of the effects of existing contracts, cost estimates of proposed new benefits, statements on the impact of proposed new "working conditions" on the delivery of educational services to children, public hearings before contracts are ratified, and "split level" bargaining to permit the more detailed working conditions to be worked out at the school level where individual teachers and parents can have more voice in the decisions. As a start in this direction, a joint task force of the Public Education Association and the United Parents Association in New York City has proposed a campaign for "Truth in Bargaining" which calls for public disclosure of the full costs and impact on services before new obligations are entered into by the school system. While this is only a beginning to the reforms needed, it would considerably change the dynamics of the bargaining process and help to open up the bureaucracy to both parent and individual teacher influence.

5. The total learning community Another growing force that may help to change bureaucratic school structures is the movement to extend education into community institutions, employment experiences, and educational options outside the regular school program. At least five major national commissions and two reports prepared within the New York City school system during the past five years have recommended such a broadening of public education, and leading educators such as Lawrence Cremin of Teachers College have become vigorous advocates of this approach.[63] The Public Education Association has had a task force working since September 1976 under grants from the New York Community Trust and the Hazen Foundation to explore the feasibility of such a "total learning community" for New York City.[64]

It is already clear that a movement from a "school" system to an "educational" system, as John Henry Martin, chairman of one of the national commissions has put it, would have profound implications for the bureaucratic structure of the schools. It will confront us with an important choice: should such a diverse educational system, including museums, volunteer community projects, employment opportunities, and public media, be organized under a yet bigger and more extensive bureaucratic structure, or should other forms of organization be found to accommodate the many diverse elements of such a system and provide for public accountability, collective bargaining, financing, personnel administration and other essential

functions by techniques other than the classic pyramidal hierarchy of the bureaucracy? The evident impracticality of the first option should increase the chances that we will pursue the second. Indeed experience with pilot projects such as street academies, internships, mini-schools, and public television points in this direction.

The extraordinary response of Columbus, Ohio to its month-long school shutdown in the 1977 energy shortage is significant on this score. School Superintendent John Ellis, instead of "hunkering down" to preserve the status quo until schools could open again, took the leadership to open up the educational process to the entire community. He persuaded students, teachers, community, the union, and perhaps most importantly, his own subordinates in the school bureaucracy, to "suspend the rules" during the emergency and find every possible way to use the community's resources to help educate children. A great sense of liberation resulted as Columbus became a "total learning community" for one month. Some think that Columbus will never be the same again. The community has been given a taste of what education might be like once we escape from the stultifying and isolating structures we have set up to separate our schools from our communities.[65]

6. Student choice Some think that efforts to "de-bureaucratize" our school systems are doomed to failure, and that in any case education should be based more on individual student and family choice. The most noted proposal in this direction is the "voucher" plan, which would put public funds directly into the hands of parents, enabling them to buy their children's education on the open market.[66] This radically changes accountability from the kind provided by a bureaucratic system. When dissatisfied with a school, a parent, instead of trying to find some way to give "voice" to his complaint in order to get the bureaucracy to change the school, is instead given a means of "exit" from the school altogether so he can seek another more to his liking.[67]

There are both very attractive aspects and very serious problems about the voucher idea, and it is certainly a controversial one. It would clearly threaten those with vested interests within present school bureaucracies, and some feel that it would destroy public education altogether and create a highly stratified, segregated, "private" school system supported by public funds.[68] While these arguments are vigorously countered by proponents, there is little movement toward full voucher systems in American public education at the present time.

There is, however, a growing movement for giving students and their parents more choices within a public school system.[69] "Options and alternatives" are becoming almost a fad, to the point where there may be a danger of creating alternative programs without the necessary systems for accountability, funding, and counseling to enable the alternatives to function effectively and protect students from inferior education. If the movement continues to gain momentum,

which it probably will, it is possible that we will begin to approach the voucher idea from the back door, and in the process develop new support and accountability structures and new definitions of "public" and "private" that will permit a greater diversity of choice within a system of public accountability.

The Proposal for a Single Education Commissioner

One thing should be clear from the above analysis: the appointment of a single city commissioner of education to replace the lay board of education, as recommended by New York's Mayor, would not in itself deal with the fundamental need to change the bureaucratic structure of the school system. Such a change in the top governance structure could, however, be the occasion for making some of the needed changes in the basic infrastructure of the system.

If the legislation is not properly drawn, a city commissioner might simply take over the present bureaucracy, leaving all of its present ills intact: "many levels in the chain of command;" "an upward orientation of anxious subordinates;" "vertical and horizontal fragmentation, isolating units from one another and limiting communication and coordination of functions;" "chauvinism within particular units, reflected in actions to protect and expand their power;" "compulsive rule following and rule enforcing;" "increasing insulation from clients;" a tendency to increase budget rather than productivity, and the treatment of students and teachers alike as cogs in a machine rather than members of a human group engaged in a process of human growth and development.[7]

In fact, one of the serious ills of our present bureaucratic structure might even be aggravated under a mayoral commissioner: since political accountability will be emphasized, any trivial complaint and issue might be brought to the mayor's doorstep, demanding his intervention and consuming the time, attention and talent of the system's top officials even more than at present, to the detriment of their essential management functions. The classic "unresponsiveness" of a separate "non-political" professional bureaucracy was to some extent purposely intended to protect top school officials from just such disruption of orderly managerial supervision of the system.

The ills of the bureaucratic structure can be diminished under a city education commissioner only if the legislation establishing such a commissioner, unlike the Decentralization Law of 1969 and other "reform" legislation of the past 15 years, includes specific measures to deal with these ills. At a minimum these measures should include:

(1) very clearly defined and sharply limited powers and responsibilities for the commissioner, so that he or she cannot be beleaguered with problems large and small arising in a system of over 900 schools, and so that he or she can effectively perform, and be held accountable for the performance of, important city wide functions.

(2) elimination of the overlapping powers and duties which have bedeviled the relationships between central and local authorities under the 1969 Decentralization Law, so that the community boards can be held clearly accountable for their operation of the elementary, intermediate, and junior high schools. In separating local and central functions, some of the functions of the present Board of Education, such as the hearing of appeals from decisions of the community school boards under section 2590g of the State Education Law, might be allocated to the State Commissioner of Education, who already performs such quasi-judicial functions for other school systems in the state.

(3) a temporary transition mechanism to help untangle the present extensive bureaucratic superstructure, pare it down to the size needed to perform the essential citywide functions, and sort out the staff in terms of seniority, tenure and professional qualifications so that they can be placed into the new streamlined structure over perhaps a two-year period. This was an important recommendation of the original Bundy decentralization proposal that was unfortunately dropped by the legislature.[71] The temporary transition mechanism should be put under an outside authority, such as the State Commissioner of Education, to reduce the risk of a new city commissioner being tempted to hold onto as much power as possible.

In addition to these minimum requirements to prevent a new city education commissioner from merely taking over--and being captured by--the present school bureaucracy, there are other reforms that would be desirable in the enabling legislation:

(4) a requirement for "school site management"--mandating at each school a planning council of staff, students, and parents, with sufficient flexibility so that their plans for better use of available resources at the school level can actually be carried out.

(5) a "Truth in Bargaining" provision, requiring that information be provided to the public on the full costs and service impact of all collective bargaining proposals before contracts are agreed to. Procedures for participation of parent representatives in the bargaining process, and perhaps public hearings prior to contract settlement, should also be required.

Conclusion

Can the bureaucratic structures of our large city school systems be changed? Of course they can, but not without resistance from those whose jobs or work habits would be threatened. Not without considerable inventiveness and trial and error to develop new and more effective structures. And not without more public understanding of the fact that the bureaucratic structure, which we now take for granted as the way to organize a school system, is not effective and must be changed.

The great danger is that people will expect change to take place more quickly than is possible. A huge and complex structure that has taken over a hundred years of laborious effort by schoolpeople to build, cannot be changed quickly. The process of changing from the bureaucratic system to a new kind of organization has been underway for more than a dozen years in New York; all six of the reforms listed above have been started to one degree or another. The changes are now beginning to gain momentum as the body politic becomes more aware that there are some fundamental problems with the way we run our schools--problems which cannot be remedied by a few gimmicky new programs spread over the surface of a basically sick system. The fact that virtually every candidate in New York's 1977 mayoral campaign has singled out education as a major issue and sees the need for strong remedial action is a sign that the deep ills of our urban school systems are no longer the subjects only for academic analysis or community demonstrations. The time has clearly come for sound fundamental reform.

Those who are disposed to give up because so little has been changed thus far may take heart from the conjecture of David Tyack, one of the most sensitive of our current educational historians: "...historians a hundred years hence may consider the ferment of the 1960's and 1970's to be a major turning point in the history of American education, comparable in impact to the common school crusade of the mid-nineteenth century or the program of the administrative progressives in the early twentieth century."[72] Only if we act in the spirit of this hope can our society counteract what Fred Hechinger has called America's "headlong retreat from its commitment to education." As Hechinger said, "At stake is nothing less than the survival of American democracy."[73]

Notes

(A list of References follows)

1 Address of Ewald Nyquist before the United Parents Association, New York City, May 6, 1977.

2 Shields, pp. 150-151.

3 Rogers, p. 266 and throughout; Sarason, p. 47 (Sarason's comment is that "it is perhaps too charitable to conclude that 'the more things change the more they remain the same,' if only because so many people continue to be unaware that basically nothing has changed."): Katz, p. xviii.

4 Rogers, p. 266, "The temptation in diagnosing how the schools have failed is to search for scapegoats. Actually, the entire institution of public education is to blame, as are the present conditions of urban life that it confronts. Nobody can make the system work if the bureaucratic structure is not radically altered."

5 Messerli, pp. xii-xiii.

6 Ravitch, p. 185.

7 Tyack, p. 43. Tyack quotes William T. Harris, superintendent of schools in St. Louis and later U.S. Commissioner of Education, as saying in 1871, "that in modern industrial society 'conformity to the time of the train, to the starting of work in the manufactory,' and to other characteristic activities of the city requires absolute precision and regularity. The corollary was that the school should be a model of bureaucratic punctuality and precision..."; Bowles and Gintis, p.129. Their book is in large part a discussion of "the two main objectives of dominant classes in educational policy: the production of labor power and the reproduction of those institutions and social relationships which facilitate the translation of labor power into profits."

8 Greenbaum. This is the main thesis of the article.

9 Tyack, p. 38.

10 Tyack, p. 127. Also p. 28. "Convinced that there was one best system of education for urban populations, leading educators sought to discover it and implement it. They were impressed with the order and efficiency of the new technology and forms of organization they saw around them. The division of labor in the factory, the punctuality of the railroad...

these aroused a sense of wonder and excitement in men and women seeking to systematize the schools.... Efficiency, rationality, continuity, precision, impartiality became watchwords of the consolidators. In short, they tried to create a more bureaucratic system."

11 Tyack, Part II, "From Village School to Urban System: Bureaucratization in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 28-77.

12 Rogers, p. 342; Educational Priorities Panel, Report to the City Council and Board of Estimate, May 16, 1977.

13 Michaelsen, p. 239.

14 Hirschman, p 57. "But what if we have to worry, not only about the profit-maximizing exertions and exactions of the monopolist, but about his proneness to inefficiency, decay and flabbiness? This may be, in the end, the more frequent danger: the monopolist sets a high price for his products not to amass super-profits, but because he is unable to keep his costs down; or, more typically, he allows the quality of the product or service he sells to deteriorate without gaining any pecuniary advantage in the process."

15 The literature on the conflicts between bureaucratic and professional authority is extensive. See Blau, pp. 127-135; Etzioni, ed., especially Chapter One by Lortie, pp. 1-53; and Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals."

16 Katz, p. 16.

17 Bennis, 1965, p.5.

18 Lortie, pp.10-15. Principals in New York City have gone to great lengths to proclaim themselves as "non-managerial" employees who operate primarily on the basis of orders from above. Cf: The New York Times, editorial, "Schools Without Leaders," February 27, 1973; Hearings of the New York State Public Employee Relations Board on the Council of Supervisors and Administrators claim of non-managerial status of principals, January-February, 1973.

19 Gouldner, p. 134.

20 Lortie. pp. 40-41.

21 Intrinsic to bureaucracy is the distinction between "client" and "bureaucrat." Berger, Berger, and Kellner, pp. 43-44, p. 59.

22 Seeley, 1976, p. 9; Riessman, p. 107. "My point, however, is that education and all human services is consumer-intensive and the key to increasing productivity in this sector lies

in effectively engaging and mobilizing the consumer--the child."

23 This metaphor is an old one, reflecting a recognition that goes back to the turn of the century and the beginning of the "progressive" movement in education. Ironically, the progressive movement sought to solve the problem by building the "professional bureaucracy" we have today--a structure which painfully fails to fulfill the dreams of its creators. See Cremin, 1964. Illich, one of the most radical critics of the schools, is especially convincing in his analysis of how the "process" of schooling is often confused with the "substance" of learning (p. 1.).

24 Hirschman, 1958, p. 5; Blau makes somewhat the same point, p. 81.

25 Riessman, pp. 88-103, "Educational Programming: Strength vs. the Compensatory Approach."

26 Berger, Berger, and Kellner, pp. 59-60. "In encountering bureaucracy, the individual does not basically do things; rather, things are done to him."

27 Zeigler, Jennings, with Peak provide a thorough discussion of school board and superintendent relationships and response to public outcry.

28 Bidwell and Kasarda, pp. 65-66. "As pupil-teacher ratios declined across districts, the two median achievement scores rose. As administrative intensity rose, the achievement scores declined."

29 Shields, p. 151.

30 Quoted in Shields, p. 151.

31 Greenbaum, pp. 423-425; Berger and Neuhaus, 1977; Umans, p.12. Umans quotes Nyquist in July 1970 as saying, "Our present system of education is monolithic with largely homogeneous institutions, coercive, frequently repressive, and authoritarian in nature. It is a closed teaching system as against an open system of learning. As a recent author stated, it ignores the requirements of normal growth, subordinates everything to remote, centralized impersonal administration, and undermines the very best of our democratic ideals.' The school is still too much an institution closed off or set apart from its surrounding community."

32 Berger, Berger, and Kellner, pp. 52,55-56. "The individual expects to be treated 'justly'.... The expected 'just'

treatment, however is possible only if the bureaucracy operates abstractly, and that means it will treat the individual 'as a number.' Thus the very 'justice' of this treatment entails a depersonalization of each individual case."

33 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142); See "Improving the Handicapped Regs." in Network, published by the National Committee for Citizens in Education, April, 1977.

34 Berger, Berger, and Kellner, pp. 51-53.

35 Zeigler, Jennings, with Peak, p. 4.

36 Michaelsen, p. 236.

37 Rogers, p. 227; Zeigler, Jennings, and Peak, p.149. They discuss how this ideological separation of education and politics has resulted in an underuse of board resources. We would emphasize the resultant unlimited control by bureaucracy.

38 Berger, Berger, and Kellner discuss why a perception of injustice is likely to occur to the individual confronting the system. This perception is likely to exist even if resources are distributed equally throughout the system.

39 Pierce, p. 6; Hobson v. Hansen, 327 Supp 844 (DDC 1971).

40 Lortie, p. 7.

41 Umans, pp. 13-17, discusses the "human cost."

42 Rogers, p. 240.

43 Rogers discusses the pervasive influence of tradition in determining what actually happens in the schools. Sarason discusses "behavioral regularities" that are often not clearly perceived and, as a consequence, are not considered by policy makers.

44 The special ability of bureaucracy to squelch innovation is discussed by Thompson and, in New York City, by Rogers.

45 Weber, p. 16.

46 Ravitch, p. 185.

47 Michaelsen, p. 239.

48 Rogers, p. 13.

49 Bidwell and Kasarda, p. 57. "Nevertheless, the more important

shortcoming of the earlier work is the failure to explore ways in which the organization of education may intervene between inputs to schooling and its outcomes."

50 Bennis, 1965; 1969.

51 Shields, pp. 153-154.

52 Michaelsen, p. 239.

53 Lindblom; Wildavsky, 1964.

54 Pierce discusses at length the disadvantages of centralized budgeting; Seeley, p. 13.

55 See Educational Priorities Panel, Report to the City Council and Board of Estimate, May 16, 1977.

56 Pierce, "School Site Management."

57 Seeley, p. 10; "A Brief History of School Self-Renewal in New York City."

58 Alfred Katz is probably the best known spokesman for the "self-help" movement.

59 Weber, p. 18, suggests that a tendency towards secrecy is natural in bureaucracy. "Every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret." This tendency virtually guarantees a perpetual crisis of accountability in public agencies.

60 Coleman, p. 3. Coleman discusses the positive and negative aspects of joining "corporate" groups.

61 Report: The New York Urban Coalition New York/London Middle School Conference, October 25-29, 1976, NYC, p. 10.

62 The Community at the Bargaining Table, Cheng, pp. 7-9.

63 Cremin, Public Education. The John Henry Martin Report on The Education of Adolescents begins its recommendations, p. 10: "That the unattained practice and inadequate concept of the comprehensive high school be replaced with the more practical goal of providing comprehensive education through a variety of means including the schools."

64 See "Total Learning Community" paper, Public Education Association, NYC, 1977.

65 "Columbus Rallies to Assist Closed Schools: Public Education Sustained by Community's Effort Despite Gas Crisis," New York Times, Feb. 20, 1977.

66 Milton Friedman was the first to suggest the voucher proposal in 1955. It was modified and popularized considerably through an OEO project done by Christopher Jencks in 1970. Discussed in Benson.

67 Hirschman, 1970; pp. 16-17.

68 Benson, pp. 40, 77.

69 Benson, p. 77, pp. 37-39. The Alum Rock Union School District voucher experiment sponsored by OEO has received mixed reviews; it was conducted within the public school system. Fantini's book explores "Public Schools of Choice" at length.

70 Rogers, p. 267-268.

71 Reconnection for Learning, p. iv.

72 Tyack, p. 207.

73 Hechinger, p. 13.

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